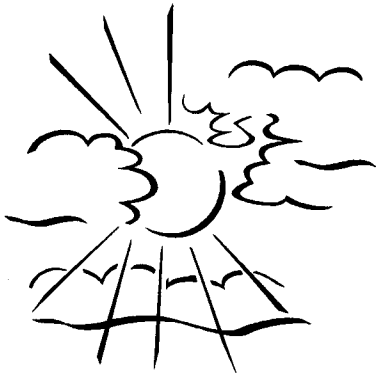


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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

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Couple must get treatment to regain kids

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

By John Agar
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A judge gave Beryl and Jerome Richards the opportunity to regain custody of their 12 adopted children.

But a family friend wondered if they stand a chance, working with people who wanted to terminate their parental rights.

"How can they not fail?" Ada resident Michele Zuidema said Tuesday. "They've already been devastated financially. Now, (the judge) puts them at her mercy."

Kent County Family Court Judge Nanaruth Carpenter on Tuesday rejected efforts to terminate parental rights, but said the couple would have to make significant changes while undergoing a court-ordered treatment program. A jury earlier awarded the court jurisdiction over the children. The children will remain in foster care pending a three-month review of the parents' progress. The case attracted widespread attention because the Richards, the biological parents of five adult children, were named the state's adoptive parents of the year by the Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association in Lansing after adopting 13 children.

It also raised questions: Why were they allowed to adopt so many? Would this model couple, respected at church, brutalize the children? Did the children make up stories of abuse, as alleged by the defense? How can the children return to a home where they said they lived in fear, subject to beatings with leather belts and extension cords?

The Richardses did not comment after the ruling, but gathered with supporters and prayed after the ruling. Bishop Walter Durham, their spokesman, called the decision "vindication. ... There's some hope in the system."

Now that Carpenter has made her ruling, the woman whose adopted son was at the center of another high-profile case says the limbo while awaiting the court process is agonizing.

Deb Wordhouse, whose adopted son, Jacob, 7, was the subject of the case that went to the state Supreme Court, has followed this case. She and her husband, John had to tell Jacob he would be returned to his biological mother before he wound up staying as their son.

"We know from our own experience how devastating it is for a child, or children, to be waiting in foster care," Wordhouse said. "It is such an uncertain time with very impressionable minds that it leaves a lot of fear and doubt. Our prayers are with the parents and each child as they endure the days to come."

Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Vicki Seidl, who sought termination of the Richardses' parental rights, was surprised by the ruling. She argued that sending the children back would only embolden the parents, and put them at further risk.

Paula Hines, an attorney for one of the children, said the family could be put back together if the parents were willing to work at it and make changes.

"I believe the parents have an opportunity here if they want to take it," she said. "Some of them do, and some of them don't."

Kristan Newhouse represented 11 children, including a 17-year-old girl who testified: "I would be scared to return there."

Carpenter did not find clear and convincing evidence that parental rights should be severed. But she said the parents would have made "radical changes." She suggested they break ties with a biological child who was accused in court, but not charged, of abusing adopted siblings.

"(The adopted children) will have to know that their well-being is more important to you than anything else," Carpenter said.

An attorney not involved with the case said Carpenter made a gutsy ruling. The easy answer would have been to terminate parental rights, attorney Debra Colletti said.

"The whole goal (of Family Court) is to work toward reunification," Colletti said, "at the same time, keep the children safe."

She said the couple could regain custody if they follow court orders. "She gave them the chance to put the family back together."

The parents were likely overwhelmed with 12 children, and should not have been allowed to adopt so many, particularly children having special needs, Colletti said.

Sharon Loughridge, executive director at D.A. Blodgett Services for Children and Families, defended the placement of so many children. For some, just a couple of children would be overwhelming. Others have remarkable ability to care for many more.

In this case, Blodgett worked to keep six siblings together after the Richards had adopted other children.

"You're looking at things like keeping siblings together. What is in the best interests of children?"

A History of Neglect Before Yonkers Boys Died of Scalding

By ANAHAD O'CONNOR

The New York Times

Published: December 19, 2005

WHITE PLAINS, Dec. 15 - David Maldonado said he woke up on July 29 and laid out some donuts for his two small boys, Elijah and David Jr., and then returned to bed in his Yonkers apartment to sleep off the effects of a bag of heroin he had shared with his girlfriend.

But two hours later, Mr. Maldonado awoke again, this time to a terrifying scene: the walls were radiating steam, the hallway was flooded up to his ankles, and the bodies of the two boys were lying face-up on the bathroom floor.

Elijah, nearly 3, and David Jr., 20 months, were found in blistering hot water that came pouring from the tub, their tiny frames pale and scorched from head to toe. The autopsy said the boys had died of second- and third-degree burns and their body temperatures were nearly 110 degrees.

Mr. Maldonado, 31, was charged with two counts of manslaughter, while Luz Arroyo, 26, the mother of the boys, who was in a drug-induced sleep as the children burned to death, was charged with criminally negligent homicide. Both have pleaded not guilty.

In an interview this month at the Westchester County Jail, Mr. Maldonado described what happened as an accident set in motion by a drug addiction that had spun out of his control.

"If I could go back, I never would have done that dope," said Mr. Maldonado, dressed in an orange jumpsuit and leaning over a small table. "I'm usually a light sleeper, but this time, I don't know, the drugs just got to me. I never meant for this to happen."

Brendan O'Meara, a lawyer for Ms. Arroyo, said last week that he could not comment on the case.

But law enforcement officials say that the deaths of the two boys, which shocked Westchester, may have been more than just the unforeseen accident that Mr. Maldonado has described.

County records and interviews with officials reveal a portrait of a troubled family with a history of child neglect. And although Mr. Maldonado maintains his innocence, investigators have suggested that he turned on the shower faucet that morning and then deliberately locked the boys

in the bathroom, a form of cruel punishment that apparently brought him to the attention of social workers two years earlier.

Mr. Maldonado and Ms. Arroyo are set to stand trial this month, but as the full picture of their story comes out, those involved in the case say it has also had the much larger effect of casting the county's Department of Social Services in an unforgiving light.

The family had been under the agency's supervision since 2003. One caseworker, Dennaya Joyce, who was later fired, admitted to county officials that she had not seen the boys for nearly 60 days before they died, even though she had been required to visit the home once every two weeks. Her supervisor, Jacqueline Byrnes, now faces disciplinary action for failing to keep tabs on her.

This information, which trickled out in hearings and in statements made by social service officials in the weeks after the boys died, prompted a harsh examination of the agency and in turn exposed deep tensions between the top two officials in Westchester, Jeanine F. Pirro, the district attorney, and Andrew J. Spano, the county executive.

The two have fought bitterly over a grand jury report, issued by Ms. Pirro's office after the deaths, that described the social services agency as a mess and harshly criticized its handling of the case.

Mr. Spano, a staunch defender of the agency, insists that any mistakes in the way the case was handled were the fault of two employees who broke the rules - Ms. Joyce and her supervisor. He also said that Ms. Pirro, angered by the county's refusal to let her control an independent Child Fatality Review Team, had chosen to use the two tragic deaths to wage a nasty political attack. "There is no way the department is responsible for the deaths of these children," Mr. Spano said at a news conference this month. "This department is among the best - if not the best - social services departments in the state. That grand jury report was simply inappropriate and full of inaccuracies."

In what has become an unusually personal feud between the two officials, Ms. Pirro responded to Mr. Spano by calling his comments "self-serving" and saying he "ought to take a civics course" to understand how a grand jury panel functions.

"Fifty-eight days after the Department of Social Services last saw these boys, they were put in a hot room and steamed to death," she said. "That report was issued by a grand jury - citizens of this county - who were outraged and demanded to know how this happened."

Of Mr. Maldonado's claim that he never locked his boys in the bathroom, Ms. Pirro said only, "That's for the jury to decide."

About the only thing that has become clear, those involved in the case say, is that Mr. Maldonado and Ms. Arroyo had already begun their slide before they met and started dating in late 2002.

Ms. Arroyo, a former prostitute, was then a 23-year-old mother of three from Buffalo. She had her first child, Brandon, when she was 16, and would later give up custody of him and another child to relatives. But she kept her youngest, a curly-haired boy named Elijah Santana, whom she named after the man she believed was his father.

Elijah was 3 months old when Ms. Arroyo met Mr. Maldonado.

"I treated him like he was my own son," Mr. Maldonado said at the jail, staring down at his hands. "I felt as if he was closer to me than he was to his own mother, even though he wasn't my kid."

Reared in a rough neighborhood in Yonkers, Mr. Maldonado said he went into the relationship with troubles of his own. He had drifted through various schools as a teenager and had repeated

brushes with the law, spending time in jail on charges including misdemeanor assault and felony drug possession, police records show.

Mr. Maldonado said that he and Ms. Arroyo began smoking crack together and he eventually lost his job at Sears. His cousin Daniel Lopez said Mr. Maldonado had tried to kick his drug habit but could not stick with it.

Nonetheless, the couple appeared to be loving parents, the cousin said.

"They fought a lot, probably like any other couple," he said. "But whatever happened, they never got the kids involved. They always kept the kids out of it."

By August 2003, Ms. Arroyo had moved into the cramped apartment that Mr. Maldonado shared with his mother, Carmen, in Yonkers.

It was around that time that concerns were first raised about Elijah, then 1. Ms. Arroyo was pregnant with David Jr. and had checked into a hospital with kidney stones. While she was there, a nurse claimed she had overheard a conversation in which Mr. Maldonado boasted of punishing Elijah by locking him in what was described as a "hot room."

The nurse notified state authorities of the conversation, filing a brief but chilling report that foreshadowed how the brothers would eventually die.

"The child is allowed to cry until he falls to sleep and stops crying," the complaint said. "There is concern that the child could suffer from heat exhaustion."

When a caseworker visited the home days later, Mr. Maldonado told him that he left the job of disciplining Elijah to his mother and never got involved. Carmen Maldonado, who was also there, told the caseworker that the report was absurd because "there were no hot rooms in the home."

But in less than a year more allegations followed.

In the summer of 2004, with David Jr. now about 6 months old, the family briefly stayed at a shelter in Elmsford, where they were reported to have had such heated arguments that they barely noticed when one of the boys fell out of his crib three times.

According to the district attorney's office, another complaint to the state said the parents had been selling diapers meant to be used by the boys to get money for cocaine and heroin.

But according to county records, the boys never showed any marks or bruises or appeared malnourished. Mr. Maldonado and Ms. Arroyo, when confronted, always denied the allegations and said they were not abusing drugs. And so the social service agency never acted to remove the children from the home, something that Ms. Pirro, in an interview, said suggested that the caseworkers had been naïve.

"These people are supposed to be investigators," Ms. Pirro said. "How would we function as a society if every time a police officer went out and spoke to a criminal, they denied everything and then the officer just went away?"

Sometime in April 2005, Ms. Joyce became the last caseworker to visit the Maldonado home. On that visit, the couple again asserted that their boys were well cared for, and they refused services or drug treatment. Ms. Joyce wrote in her notes that the boys were at "moderate" risk of danger. She was supposed to follow up with the family within two weeks, but never did. Her supervisor, Ms. Byrnes, told county officials after the boys died that Ms. Joyce had lied to her about visiting the family.

When they were interrogated on July 29, both couple told detectives that they had snorted heroin the night before. They were in a deep sleep, they said, while Elijah and David Jr., were in the bathroom fighting for their lives, at one point standing on their toes to escape the burning water and heat, their autopsies showed.

Mr. Maldonado suggested that Elijahah might have gone into the bathroom and turned the water on himself, taking his younger brother with him. "Elijahah was a big kid; I was always trying to keep up with him," he said.

Ms. Arroyo has made no public statements about the case. In the highly public agony that followed, a group of county legislators held hearings. Ms. Pirro summoned a grand jury, and the social services agency conducted an internal inquiry that resulted in Ms. Joyce's firing. Ms. Pirro insists that the problem was the agency itself, that its caseworkers were poorly trained and its management careless.

But others have said the case was fraught with complications, made worse by the fact that two social workers had failed to do their jobs. The department's defenders stressed that the agency was the focus of two independent and exhaustive evaluations by two separate child welfare agencies in recent years, and each gave the department high marks. Both evaluations were conducted largely before David Jr., and Elijahah were killed.

"I'm not so sure the state of the department is as bleak as Ms. Pirro's grand jury report has indicated," said Michael Kaplowitz, a county legislator from Somers and a member of the legislative committee that held hearings on the case. "But I also don't know if it's as rosy as Mr. Spano's defense is."

At the jail, Mr. Maldonado, who faces up to 25 years in prison, said he thinks about the boys often. He said he writes letters to a pastor at the jail and prays several times a week, with the boys in his thoughts. He insisted that he never abused them, and said he was devastated when the jail turned down his request to attend their funeral.

"That killed me," he said. "I've made some mistakes in my life. But I would never do what they said I did."

Trial is set for Nash

By Elisabeth Waldon - Daily News staff writer

December 21, 2005

IONIA — A Belding woman accused of killing her 3-month-old daughter is set to go to trial.

Amy Jo Nash, 22, was arraigned Tuesday before Judge David Hoort in 8th Judicial Circuit Court in Ionia. She is charged with second-degree murder in the March 13 death of her daughter, Janie Lynn. Nash is accused of laying Janie face down on a pillow in the crib of the family's Brentwood Apartment residence, suffocating and killing the infant. Nash is being held in the Ionia County Jail in Ionia on \$100,000 bond.

Her brunette hair pulled back, wearing purple flip-flops, blue jail clothes and an orange Ionia County Jail coat, Nash appeared in court with her attorney, Todd VanEck of Belding.

She answered, "Yes, I do, " when Hoort asked her if she understood the charges. Nash then pleaded not guilty.

VanEck asked Hoort for several months to prepare for the jury trial and Hoort granted the request. Nash's trial date will be scheduled at a later date.

"We're going to need time," VanEck said.

Outside the courtroom, Carolyn DeVries of Lowell wept as she hugged her son and Nash's husband, Robert Wayne Nash Jr. of Belding.

"I don't know how we're going to get through this," she said. "It's going to be a long wait. My heart is beating so fast."

According to court records, Nash pleaded no contest to abusing her 2-year-old daughter, Jade Makay Lofquist, on March 23 — 10 days after Janie died. Nash admitted to Children's Protective Services that she lost her temper and struck Jade on the buttocks 12 to 15 times until being physically restrained by her husband.

Nash underwent a psychological evaluation on April 29 by licensed psychologist Thomas M. Spahn. The psychological report stated that "she (Nash) may possibly be struggling with major depression with a periodic slight break with reality" and that "she definitely needs involvement in a parenting class and a period of monitoring."

Nash's custody rights were terminated May 19. On July 27, Judge Robert Sykes Jr. placed Jade in the home of a relative, where she remains.

According to the Michigan State Police 6th District Headquarters in Grand Rapids, Nash signed a statement May 3 reading, "My child, Janie Nash, had spina bifida, club feet and water on the brain. I was under so much stress of her and the medical stuff and little or no help from Rob. I

snapped and my baby died on March 13, 2005.

“I love my daughters so much more than life,” the statement said. “I knew laying Janie on a pillow facedown she would die. I wrote this of my own free will.”

Staff writer Elisabeth Waldon can be reached at ewaldon@staffordgroup.com or (616) 754-9303 ext. 3065.

Mother waives hearing on attempted murder charge

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

Kalamazoo Gazette Staff Reports

The Portage woman who police say tried to kill her 9-year-old son waived her preliminary examination Tuesday in Paw Paw.

Amy T. Soule, 32, is to be arraigned in Van Buren County Circuit Court on Jan. 3, court officials said. She is charged with attempted murder.

Soule called police Dec. 5 and said she had tried to kill her son after an argument about snow pants, Michigan State Police said. Something just ``snapped," she told them, according to police. Soule could be sentenced to up to life in prison if convicted.

Judge returns brother of drowning victim to family

FLUSHING TOWNSHIP
THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

By Ron Fonger
rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

FLUSHING TWP. - A 3-year-old township boy is headed home for Christmas, almost four months after he was taken from his parents amid allegations that his deceased younger sister may have been sexually abused. Genesee Circuit Judge John A. Gadola sent the boy back to his parents in a hearing Tuesday, but said he's not ready to dismiss the case that could terminate the parental rights of Steven and Kristy Vamos.

The judge said he wants an explanation first from Hurley Medical Center, telling him why emergency room doctors suggested that Jamie M. Vamos might have been molested when they examined her body Sept. 1 after she accidentally drowned in the family swimming pool.

A report from the Oakland County medical examiner's office, which conducted the autopsy on Jamie, concluded that the 20-month-old died from accidental drowning and that there was "no physical evidence found to substantiate the allegation of sexual abuse of this child."

A Vamos family member provided the document to The Flint Journal.

Kristy Vamos said she's thrilled to have her son back and ready for Hurley to answer for the suspicions they helped raise.

Less than 24 hours after Jamie Vamos' death, the Department of Human Services filed a petition to take her brother from his parents, citing Hurley reports that Jamie may have been sexually abused as part of the justification. Her brother has stayed with relatives since, and his parents have been allowed only supervised visitation.

"We are so happy to have (him) home for Christmas," Kristy Vamos said after Tuesday's hearing. "I'm glad the judge is ordering Hurley to explain."

A DHS report says Hurley doctors found severe rectal and vaginal bruising and lacerations and completed a rape kit on Jamie, but Oakland County says in a written opinion that smeared blood on the child likely came from multiple needle punctures of the right and left groin areas - part of an effort to resuscitate the child -before she ever arrived at the hospital.

I want something further ... a final explanation," Gadola said. "If that requires a court order, I will require that.

QUICK TAKE

What's next? On Tuesday, Genesee Circuit Judge John A. Gadola sent Steven and Kristy Vamos' 3-year-old son home for the first time in nearly four months.

A termination hearing on the Vamoses' parental rights has been continued to Feb. 7. Gadola said he's not ready to dismiss the case until he gets a full explanation of differing medical reports from Hurley Medical Center and the Oakland County medical examiner's office.

"The autopsy report shows something far, far, far less dramatic" than the initial reports from Hurley, the judge said. The medical opinions seem from "two different worlds," stretching his arms apart to emphasize the point.

The Journal could not reach township Police Chief Douglas Kennedy for comment Tuesday. Police have apparently not yet closed a criminal investigation into Jamie's death.

Matthew Stewart, an attorney for the Vamos family, said Hurley doctors may have approached the examination of Jamie Vamos differently because some of those who responded first to a 911 call treated the case as a possible molestation.

"Hurley didn't start with a blank slate," Stewart said. "There was traffic back and forth that this was a sex abuse case coming."

Hurley spokesman Larry Daly said reports may have been different because doctors were being asked to do different things.

"If they are going to bring the physicians together, that's probably the best course of action," Daly said.

DHS reports didn't save 30 children

Date: Sunday, December 18, 2005

Source: Tulsa World (Oklahoma)

Author: ZIVA BRANSTETTER

Skyla Brooks was only 21 months old when she died from a beating at the hands of her mother's boyfriend. Her grandmother knew Skyla was in danger and tried in vain to save the girl. "They let me hold her before she died," said Robyn Brooks, Skyla's paternal grandmother. "I sang three of her favorite nursery songs to her before she passed away in my arms." Skyla is among 30 children who fell through the cracks in the state's child welfare system since July 1, 1999. These children died even though the state had prior reports they were being abused or neglected. In today's Tulsa World, we explore each case. In Monday's paper, stories will detail ways to prevent abuse and who the abusers typically are.

At least 30 children have died from abuse and neglect in Oklahoma in recent years, despite the fact that the state had previous reports they were being abused or neglected or had requests to check on them, an investigation by the Tulsa World has found.

In most cases, the Department of Human Services closed reports of abuse or neglect involving the children who later died, finding the reports unconfirmed.

In at least five cases, DHS closed investigations because the agency could not find the child. In eight, it had an open investigation when the child died.

In one case, DHS failed to check on a boy who moved from California, despite a request from officials there. The boy died within six months of arriving in Oklahoma, a case DHS acknowledges was "out of policy."

Tammy Taylor, the mother of a 2-year-old Tulsa boy scalded to death in June, believes her son fell through the gaps in the state's child welfare system.

In the weeks before Keenan Taylor's scalding death, DHS received three reports the toddler was being abused. Two were pending at the time of the 2-year-old's death, records show.

The boy died June 9, the day after being burned by hot water over more than 50 percent of his body. His father, Carlis Ball, did not seek medical treatment for Keenan until about 20 hours after the injury, reports show. Ball, who is charged with first-degree murder in the child's death, told police it was an accident, but police and doctors said there is evidence the scalding was intentional.

"It took something like this to happen to get everybody's attention that children are being abused. Some are even dying, and they are dying at the hands of their parents," Taylor said.

But DHS officials said, despite the state's best efforts, some children will die from abuse and neglect even though the state has reports they are being abused.

"Unless we live with these children 24 hours a day, there is no way we can truly protect a child," said Esther Rider-Salem, child protective services programs manager for DHS.

Rider-Salem said a DHS committee reviews all cases in which children die from abuse and neglect to determine whether the agency followed its policies and state law. The agency also moves quickly to protect any surviving siblings, she said.

Last fiscal year, 51 Oklahoma children died from abuse and neglect, the highest number in more than a decade. The number of children in foster care also soared to a record high, hitting 7,500 in October.

In a six-month investigation, the World reviewed medical examiner's reports, death certificates, court records and other public records to identify children who have died from abuse and neglect since July 1, 1999. State law allows DHS to release summaries of its prior contacts with a family if a primary caretaker is charged.

Of the 72 cases, DHS had prior reports of abuse, neglect or contact involving 26 children, the World found. DHS also released records showing the agency had prior contact with four more children whose deaths were reported in 2005.

The documents show that among the 30 cases, DHS received a total of 77 reports the children or their siblings were being abused or neglected. Some cases had as many as seven prior reports of abuse or neglect in the household while others received only a single report. In every case, the children were allowed to remain in the home and ultimately died from abuse or neglect.

'They didn't do anything' About a year before Sheilla Shea confessed to police that she stabbed her 6-year-old son to death, DHS received two reports alleging problems in the Shea household.

One report did not meet the criteria for investigation. The other case was closed after Patric and his siblings were not found to be in any immediate danger and their mother was referred to counseling services.

Shea's sister-in-law, Martha Quinton Shea, said she filed one of those reports as Sheilla Shea's mental health and the condition of the family's Tulsa home deteriorated. DHS workers interviewed Patric and Sheilla Shea at their home on June 6, 2004, and the home had been repaired, a report says.

Martha Shea said she did not call DHS again "because they didn't do anything the first time."

Patric Shea's siblings watched as their mother jumped on him and repeatedly stabbed him July 2. Sheilla Shea is being held on a charge of first-degree murder.

"After Patric's death, DHS told me that by law that they could not do anything until he is physically hurt. Now he is not hurt; he is dead," Martha Shea said.

In another case, an Enid victim's father said he had no idea an abuser was living in his own household, even though DHS was aware the woman had a history of prior complaints involving other children.

"If I had any clue she was abusive to her own children, I wouldn't let her around my child," Leroy Buffum said of his girlfriend.

DHS workers visited Buffum's home in July 2002 after receiving a complaint his girlfriend, Kathy M. Taylor, had abused his daughter, Karen Bell, 3.

The complaint could not be verified, but Buffum said DHS should have told him then the agency had four previous complaints Taylor had neglected her own children before the two started dating.

DHS confirmed one of those reports as neglect, a 1998 case involving Taylor's children living in inadequate and dangerous conditions. Taylor pleaded no contest to first-degree murder in Karen's 2003 death and received a life without parole sentence.

Buffum said he still regularly visits his daughter's gravesite, sometimes reading a book aloud.

"I'll talk to my daughter whenever things get stressful to me," Buffum said. "It helps me keep my sanity."

Rider-Salem said state law prevents DHS workers from telling others in the household about prior reports of abuse.

"We can only share with someone else what is public record, but if we do have concerns, we can get with the person who is the original abuser and say, 'You need to talk with this individual about what has gone on previously.' "

She couldn't save her Robyn Brooks knew her granddaughter was in danger, but she said despite her pleas for help, she couldn't save her. Skylia Brooks, a 21-month-old from Bristow, died March 21, 2000, from head injuries caused by violent shaking or blunt force.

Evidence showed Skylia had knuckle marks on her forehead and 16 bruises beneath the scalp.

Kurt Vomberg Jr., the mother's boyfriend, pleaded no contest to second-degree murder and child abuse and received a 35-year prison term last year. Tammy Renee Brooks, the child's mother, received a 20-year sentence for child neglect.

Robyn Brooks, the paternal grandmother of Skylia Brooks, said Skylia was alert and playful on Feb. 16, 2000, the last time she saw the child. Brooks said she urged DHS to intervene before it was too late.

"I do not think DHS was involved as much as they could have been, but I also believe DHS workers have too heavy of a load," Brooks said. "Grandparents also do not have enough say-so. Those two things worked against Skylia and cost her her life."

'Underfunded, undermanned'

Tulsa Police Chief Dave Been said that he believes DHS Director Howard Hendrick "has done as much as anyone can do" with the agency.

"The problem is that it is such a huge, unwieldy state organization. It is tough. It is underfunded, undermanned. The case loads are too heavy."

Those in the child abuse prevention field agree it's unfair to place full responsibility on the state

to protect children in jeopardy.

"We have a system that is reactive, not proactive, because we don't know what will happen," said Barbara Findeiss, executive director of the Child Abuse Network. Findeiss said DHS workers are not alone in making decisions. Every county is represented by a multidisciplinary team, made up of every agency investigating child abuse and neglect in that area.

Parent Child Center Executive Director Claudette Selph said DHS has been hampered by low salaries for workers, resulting in high turnover and inexperienced staff.

"It's not that we're putting resources in the wrong places; it's that we are not putting enough resources in place," Selph said.

DHS child welfare workers have an average of 15 to 20 cases each, almost twice the level recommended by the Child Welfare League of America, said DHS spokesman George Johnson. The agency has asked lawmakers for 112 additional child welfare workers next fiscal year, at a cost of \$4.1 million.

'A heavy, heavy burden'

In eight of the cases reviewed by the World, DHS had an active investigation or pending report at the time the child died. In those cases, case workers either could not substantiate the prior reports or could not locate the family.

Rider-Salem said DHS workers involve law enforcement, check utility records and flag the agency's other divisions to find those children. After spending 26 years in the child welfare system, Rider-Salem said she knows how personally involved the workers become.

"I endured this as a worker, and I cannot tell you how devastating this is to staff. Invariably they get blamed or feel responsible. It carries a heavy, heavy burden."

Yet the 30 cases are the flip side of a larger story, those children who the state did save, she said.

"We have no way of knowing how many children we've saved from dying. I kind of look at things from the positive side, but it's not a perfect system."

Some sex offenders may be forced to wear GPS trackers

Web-posted Dec 21, 2005

By SVEN GUSTAFSON
Of The Oakland Press

PONTIAC - Convicted sex predators who target children could be forced to undergo realtime satellite monitoring under legislation announced by state Rep. David Law on Tuesday. The proposal would set up Michigan's own version of the so-called Jessica's Law.

Following the proposal after the Florida measure, Law said the legislation would require convicted sex offenders who prey upon children under age 13 to wear global satellite tracking devices for life. The proposal would apply to those convicted of first- or second-degree sex offenses, which include penetration or unlawful touching for the purpose of arousal.

The proposal would also require individual offenders to reimburse the state for the costs of monitoring "where they are able to do so," and would make it a two-year felony for an offender to attempt to remove, deactivate or damage the tracking device or neglect to pay reimbursement where required.

"That's a tool whose time has come," said Law, a Commerce Township Republican and former assistant prosecutor for Oakland County. "We have to do everything as a state and society to protect our children."

Jessica's Law is named after Jessica Langford, a 9-year-old Florida girl who was raped and murdered after being snatched from her bedroom by a registered sex offender living nearby.

When it was signed in May, it was cited as one of the toughest child-sex laws in the nation.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of November, at least 12 states including Florida have passed laws establishing satellite monitoring of sex offenders. Minnesota and Texas are experimenting with the technology without legislation.

Law announced the legislation during a news conference with Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorceyca and Sheriff Michael Bouchard, who helped draft the proposal. As a state senator, Bouchard sponsored the 1994 law that created a sex offender registry in Michigan, which requires certain sex offenders to register their names and addresses annually with the State Police for at least 25 years.

A member of the House Judiciary Committee, Law said the proposal is needed because pedophiles demonstrate high rates of recidivism and because satellite tracking would make it easier to quickly track the whereabouts of offenders. He said nearly three-fourths of abducted children who are murdered are killed within the first three hours of being kidnapped.

Law cited a recent media report that found that the state cannot account for nearly one-fourth of its registered sex offenders.

"That's 9,000 offenders running unchecked throughout the state of Michigan," Law said. "That's unacceptable and that's scary."

As of Nov. 3, the Michigan Public Sex Offender Registry listed 37,916 offenders, a figure that is not limited to child-sex offenders.

Bouchard said individual pedophiles average more than 100 victims each. He said he is often asked when it is safe to allow pedophiles to move on with their lives.

"The day they can move on with their lives is the day the child can forget the trauma that was placed upon their life as a result of that adult's action," he said.

The legislation would entrust administration of the tracking program with the state Department of Corrections. Law said Florida officials have estimated their tracking program could cost as much as \$8 million, but have so far set aside \$3.9 million.

Law said finding money to establish a similar program in Michigan boils down to making it a priority come budget time.

"To me, this is priority No. 1," he said, "and I'll take this fight to the state Legislature and make sure it's properly funded."

Law said he plans to introduce the legislation when the Legislature reconvenes in January.

Published December 21, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

State Sen. Alan Cropsey: Rules threaten care for seniors

As a state lawmaker, I am honored to be part of a system that draws upon a wide array of opinions, beliefs and knowledge to create sound public policy. I believe in broad dialogue to achieve a result that reflects a general consensus in most cases.

Disturbingly, an attempt is being made to pass through with very little opportunity for public input a series of all-encompassing rules governing the assisted living community, leaving Michigan's most vulnerable residents at risk and diminishing the number of quality choices available for them and their families.

When I chaired the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules in the 1990s, we made sure that people affected by the rules had a say in what was being developed.

Today, I'm concerned with the way the administration is promulgating rules for 50,000 of our most vulnerable citizens. At a Nov. 30 public hearing, families and providers from across the state testified that, if implemented, these proposed rules impose unnecessary and costly reporting requirements; divert resources from direct services; require personal information of employees to be subject to public disclosure; and inappropriately come close to demanding unionization of employees.

This proposed change is extremely unique. No other regulated profession or industry in Michigan defers to union status or collective bargaining to measure compliance with administrative rules. Frankly, these proposed rules do nothing to benefit the health and safety of the residents living in Adult Foster Care homes and Homes for the Aged.

The rule-making process allows the governor to implement these changes without meaningful oversight. Unfortunately, this privilege has been abused many times in recent years to the detriment of several industries and at a substantial loss of taxpayer dollars.

Consider recent history:

The governor began by developing a series of stringent regulations that would penalize Michigan home builders and send construction jobs out of state. She then moved to the insurance industry, establishing rules that would increase insurance costs for more than 60 percent of Michigan policyholders.

In both instances, the governor appeared to be sacrificing the state's critical business and economic interests to satisfy special interests. Fortunately, the courts saw the harm inherent in her proposed regulations and stopped both efforts from moving forward.

Today, the governor is moving on to the AFC industry. Although an industry workgroup was working to update the rules for AFC and HFA communities, the governor abruptly called a halt to workgroup dialogue and issued her own set of regulations - ones not even written by the departments that would oversee them.

I am extremely concerned about this process and the impact on vulnerable citizens. From what I have seen and heard so far, the rules are likely to cause long-term harm to Michigan's AFC and HFA communities.

I urge the governor to listen to families and the assisted living industry, and reconsider the process and substance associated with these rules. We must be committed to supporting high quality comprehensive services to Michigan's most vulnerable adults - not special-interest groups.

State Sen. Alan Cropsey is a DeWitt Republican.

Published December 21, 2005

[Couple posing as police rob 90-year-old Scam similar to one that netted \$9,000 in Sept.]

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

DELHI TWP. - A man and woman posing as police officers robbed a 90-year-old woman Monday in a scam similar to one that victimized an 83-year-old township woman in September.

The impostors on Monday took a significant sum of cash from the woman's home, Ingham County sheriff's Lt. Jeffrey Cook said. He would not say how much.

The impostors, a man and a woman, showed the victim silver badges that displayed the word "sheriff." They said they wanted to search the house for a bank robbery suspect who claimed to live at her address.

Advertisement

After looking through the residence and determining the woman was alone, the impostors asked if she had any money, saying they needed to see it to clear her of any involvement in the robbery, police said. When the woman showed them where she kept her money, the pair distracted her, stole the money and left.

"She thought they were examining the money and were able to slip out of her sight and then out of her residence," Cook said. "When she realized they were gone, she called police."

Police are investigating whether this incident is related to a similar scam in September, in which a couple posing as police tricked an 83-year-old woman into giving them more than \$9,000.

In that case, the impostors told the woman they were investigating counterfeit money and asked if she had any cash they could look at.

After she showed them \$150, they drove her to a bank and persuaded her to withdraw \$9,000. They replaced a bank bag containing the money with a bag of shredded paper.

The method used in both crimes sounds almost identical, sheriff's Lt. Jeff Joy said.

Similar scams have been reported in other parts of the state, Joy said, particularly the Grand Rapids area.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

To avoid being a victim of impostors

- If there's any doubt, ask for an ID card or call the police department and request that a uniformed officer come to your home to verify the claim.
- "All of our detectives and plainclothes officers have ID cards issued to them, and they carry those with their badge," Ingham County sheriff's Lt. Jeffrey Cook said.
- Ingham County's sheriff's badges are gold, have four-digit badge numbers and the state seal, and indicate the county as well as rank, Cook added.

To help

- Ingham County sheriff's officials describe one police impostor as a black man, 30 to 40 years old, about 6 feet tall and wearing glasses, a black leather jacket and black cap.
- The other one is described by police as a black woman, 30 to 40 years old, about 5 feet, 7 inches tall and also wearing glasses and a black leather jacket.
- Their vehicle is described as an older gray or blue sedan.
- Anyone with information is asked to call 676-8211.

Published December 21, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Reginald Carter: Add Medicaid funds for nursing homes

The tragic fire that occurred at Mather Healthcare in Ishpeming on Dec. 12 raises the issue of whether all nursing homes should have automatic fire sprinkler systems. The Health Care Association of Michigan and our national affiliate support a national statute (House Resolution 4491) to assist in retrofitting facilities with automatic fire sprinkler systems.

There has been much rhetoric and little movement. Possibly, the Mather case will trigger the political will to do the right thing.

Our nursing homes need to be rebuilt to include sprinklers, air conditioning, wider hallways, more home-like common areas, private bedrooms and other enhancements that would improve quality of life for their 42,000 residents.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has recognized the need to reinvest in a new model for Michigan nursing homes, which, on average, are more than 30 years old. She has offered some financial incentives for 75 model nursing homes

But there are 429 in the state that need to provide a safe and comfortable environment for our frail seniors.

The Legislature will begin negotiating the 2007 Medicaid budget in early March. This is the time to provide the mandate and the Medicaid funds necessary to dramatically enhance nursing homes in Michigan.

Then, the 42,000 families we serve can have peace of mind that their loved ones are better protected.

Assault charges ☐ed

Owner of foster care home that lost license enters not-guilty plea

HOLLY TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

By Christofer Machniak

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HOLLY TWP. - The owner of an adult foster care home that lost its license over inadequate supervision of residents was charged Tuesday in the alleged assault of a 53-year-old mentally disabled woman at the home.

The victim was hospitalized with injuries that included two black eyes, a fractured eye socket and scratches around the neck, said Detective Sgt. Gary Muir of the state police Groveland post. Mary Chapman, 65, of Holly Township was charged with first-degree vulnerable adult abuse, a 15-year felony, Muir said.

Her attorney, Gregory Bator, entered a not-guilty plea on her behalf, and she was released on personal bond, Muir said.

"Mrs. Chapman did not strike or hit or injure the woman, and there's no evidence of it," Bator said.

Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services, said Chapman continued to operate the Lahring Road facility as a boarding house after the license revocation. Sorbet said mentally disabled individuals can live in an unlicensed home if they get care from outside providers.

The state revoked Chapman's license in July over charges that she failed to adequately supervise residents. In one case in 2002, a 61-year-old man with dementia wandered away from the home and was struck and killed by a car.

Two months later, a disoriented elderly woman wandered away, and a month after that, a mentally ill man with Alzheimer's disease left while Chapman was vacuuming and was found walking seven miles away in Grand Blanc. The same man walked away on a 90-degree day in August 2003 and was found sitting in a ditch on Holly Road. Muir said state Adult Protective Services removed a remaining resident from the home Oct. 5.

In the assault case, the woman - who was visiting to watch a religious television show - said Chapman assaulted her after the woman became upset when they couldn't get the program and wanted to go to church instead, according to Muir.

Chapman denied the accusation, but gave authorities inconsistent stories about how the injuries were caused, said Jim Halushka, the director of warrants and investigations for the Oakland County prosecutor's office.

But Bator, a Birmingham attorney, said the victim is known for "extraordinary antisocial behavior." He said her family called to apologize for her actions and said she had a history of making false accusations. Bator said his own preliminary investigation shows her injuries were either self-inflicted or done by another individual.

Bator said the facility is Chapman's private residence. He said despite the licensing problems, Chapman has never been accused of improper personal behavior before. He said the prosecutor ignored Chapman's longtime good reputation for working with various agencies in helping the homeless find places to live.

Chapman's preliminary exam is scheduled for Jan. 5 in District Court in Clarkston, Muir said.

Charges upgraded vs. boy, 13 Criminal sexual conduct case in juvenile court

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

BY TOM TOLEN

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Charges against a 13-year-old Brighton boy were upgraded to four felony counts Tuesday in connection with a reported sexual assault involving a 7-year old girl at the Brighton Public Library last week.

The youth appeared in Livingston County Juvenile Court Tuesday before court referee Kathleen Oemke on amended charges of first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct, accosting a minor for immoral purposes and gross indecency. The boy's bond was increased from 10 percent of \$20,000 to \$100,000 cash.

Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse said he dismissed a previous charge of child sexual abusive activity in favor of the more serious CSC-1 offense after receiving a report from an interview with the girl. The interview was conducted through the Child Abuse Response Effort, a collaboration between Morse's office and LACASA, an agency which provides counseling and shelter for victims of domestic violence in Livingston County. CARE arranges interviews in a non-threatening environment for children reported to be victims of physical or sexual abuse. Brighton City Police say the boy lured the girl into the men's restroom of the library on Dec. 13 and sexually assaulted her. Morse said the youth is also a possible suspect in two other incidents involving minor girls, a matter being investigated by Michigan State Police of the Brighton post. Meanwhile, the Brighton library board voted at its regular monthly meeting Tuesday night to purchase seven security cameras at a cost of \$5,500, according to board President Anne King-Hudson. Additional security measures had already been under discussion before the sexual assault last week, she said.

Three cameras will be installed inside the building on Orndorf Drive in Brighton and four outside in the parking lot, including one by the new bookmobile, which is parked near the staff entrance.

King-Hudson said the board discussed, but did not take action on, further security measures such as locking the bathroom doors and requiring a key or remote opening from the front desk. "We want to get some feedback from other libraries and what they are doing," she said.

Morse said the library and its staff cannot be blamed for what happened. "You could put security cameras in every library, public building and street corner, but that is not practical," Morse said. "(The incident) doesn't suggest Brighton Library officials were lax in their security measures, but rather that somebody was opportunistic. Unless you live in a very tightly controlled society, these things are going to be happening," he said.

While Library Director Charlene Huget said the library doesn't have the staff to be constantly monitoring the cameras, employees will keep an eye on them. "They could have a good idea of what's going on," she said. Huget added that their presence alone should cause a person to think twice before doing something inappropriate. "The research shows that just having (cameras) acts as a deterrent," Huget said.

Morse said the juvenile court has "wide discretion" in sentencing a youth who has been convicted of such offenses. He could be sentenced to the W.J. Maxey Boys' Training Center, the state's facility in Green Oak Township for the most serious juvenile crimes, until he reaches the age of 21 (the maximum sentence allowable under the juvenile code). Or he could be placed in a foster home or put on probation.

The name of the boy, who is being held at a Washtenaw County detention facility, is being withheld because of his age.

The youth's pre-trial hearing on the charges is set for Jan. 24 at 3 p.m.

Tom Tolen can be reached at

ttolen@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at (810) 844-2009.

New sex assault charge filed against boy, 13

More serious count follows interview with girl, 7, about incident at Brighton library; boy suspected in other cases.

Steve Pardo / The Detroit News
December 21, 2005

HOWELL -- The Livingston County prosecutor has filed a new charge against a 13-year-old Brighton boy accused of assaulting a 7-year-old girl last week in the Brighton District Library.

The boy was charged Tuesday in Juvenile Court with a charge of first-degree criminal sexual assault. Last week, the boy faced lesser charges but authorities decided to charge him with the most serious sexual assault charge available after an interview with the alleged victim, according to Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse.

The Detroit News is not releasing the names of the 7-year-old or the teenager because of their ages. Morse said his office is investigating two other sexual assault allegations involving the boy.

"He's clearly a predator," Morse said. "How he got that way, we're looking into."

Authorities conducted a Child Abuse Response Effort (CARE) interview with the 7-year-old at LACASA, the county's shelter for abused women and children.

The interview involves a person trained in interviewing children while authorities, including police and prosecutors, watch from behind a two-way mirror.

"The girl revealed some things she hadn't revealed before," Morse said. He declined to elaborate on the details of the interview.

On Dec. 13, the girl was with her mother at the Brighton District Library. She was allegedly lured into the bathroom by the 13-year-old and assaulted, according to police.

The girl was only out of the sight of her mother for a few minutes, said Morse and Brighton Police Chief Thomas Wightman.

Both the parents of the girl and the 13-year-old were present at Tuesday's hearing in front of referee Kathleen Oemke. Oemke set a pretrial date for Jan. 24 and ordered him held on a \$100,000 bond.

The boy is in a juvenile detention center in Ann Arbor. Livingston County doesn't have a long-term detention facility for youths.

The teen, who was handcuffed and appeared in an orange jumpsuit, nodded to his parents when he was brought into court and then sat silently next to his attorney for the rest of the hearing.

The boy still faces additional charges of second-degree criminal sexual assault, accosting a child for immoral purposes and gross indecency. The 13-year-old is being charged as a juvenile.

If he is convicted on the charges, the state has a variety of sentencing options, which range from probation to keeping him detained in the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School in Green Oak Township until he turns 21.

Suspect in woman's death faces competency test

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

By Paul Janczewski

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A Flint man charged in the shooting death of his ex-girlfriend will be examined at a state facility to determine if he is competent for trial and could be held criminally responsible for his actions. Franklin R. Fulton, 71, is charged with murder in the Dec. 2 slaying of Dorothy M. Smith, 58. Police were called to 2114 Begole St. about 1 a.m. and found Smith dead in her kitchen with multiple gunshot wounds.

Flint police Sgt. Shawn Ellis said domestic issues may have led to the slaying.

Detroit attorney Sanford A. Schulman, who is representing Fulton, told Flint District Judge William H. Crawford II that his client had been admitted to Hurley Medical Center in the past week for "some issues."

In a forensic petition, Schulman said Fulton has "psychological disorders due to a severe alcohol dependency history" and suffered with mood swings.

Smith told a judge much of that same information when she filed for a Personal Protection Order against Fulton in early November.

Smith wrote that Fulton came to her residence several days earlier and began calling her names before grabbing her by the neck and tussling with her on a bed.

Smith said she broke up with him then, ending their 15-year relationship.

Fulton, a retired General Motors employee, is being held without bond in the Genesee County Jail.

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

Jackson Citizen Patriot

A 17-year-old Jackson man was in custody after a woman was cut trying to take away a knife during a domestic dispute early this morning.

At 2:41 a.m., Jackson police were called to the 800 block of Maltby Street where a boyfriend forced his way into a home and continued arguing with his girlfriend, Deputy Chief Matt Heins said. At one point, the 16-year-old girlfriend produced a knife, which he took away and began wielding at her. Another woman at the home was cut when she tried to grab the weapon from the boyfriend.

The suspect then stabbed himself, Heins said. They were both treated at Foote Hospital and released. He was being held in the county jail on assault and battery and home invasion

Jail guard fired after his arrest on sex charges

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

JOE SNAPPER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

A Saginaw County Jail guard arrested Monday and charged with felony criminal sexual conduct Tuesday is free today after posting his \$25,000 bond, sheriff's officials said.

Sheriff Charles L. Brown said he fired the guard -- a newly hired part-timer and a former church choir member and standout Saginaw student-athlete -- after prosecutors charged him.

"Obviously, you don't expect someone like that to do something like this," Brown said.

Jeremy L. Tatum, 20, had worked for the jail about 30 days and still was undergoing an employment evaluation and a background check, Brown said.

Tatum in 2002 had a

3.7 grade-point average, National Honor Society membership and varsity letters in baseball and football at Saginaw High School, News records show. Then a 16-year-old junior, Tatum also sang in the Mount Moriah Baptist Church choir.

Now, he is facing 15 years in prison on two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct against his girlfriend, sheriff's officials and court workers said.

Saginaw Township officers responded to a 911 call at his township home just after midnight Sunday for a domestic dispute between Tatum and his 20-year-old girlfriend, Police Chief Donald F. Pussehl said.

"We were sent there as a result of a call by the female, and as the officer was taking the report, she alleged that there was a sexual assault," Pussehl said, noting the couple lived together. Pussehl said his officers arrested and lodged Tatum in the Bay County Jail early Monday morning.

The Saginaw News could not reach Tatum. He posted 10 percent of the \$25,000 bond that Saginaw District Judge M. T. Thompson Jr. set at his Tuesday arraignment.

The judge also ordered no contact with his girlfriend. Tatum's preliminary examination is Tuesday, Jan. 3, in Thompson's courtroom, court workers said. The sheriff said Tatum had gone through the county's corrections training program.

Brown said departmental policy allows for the immediate firing of part-time employees who are charged with a crime.

"Especially a felony," the sheriff said.

Joe Snapper is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9715. Staff Writer Darryl Q. Tucker contributed to this report.

Michigan

More Michigan kids get child support – for now Federal aid cuts loom in new bill

December 21, 2005

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

State Attorney General Mike Cox reports enforcement success.

The good news about Michigan's child support system is that 40,000 more children are getting payments than three years ago.

And state Attorney General Mike Cox said Tuesday his office's aggressive enforcement has generated more than \$20.3 million in support for children.

Further, the U.S. House of Representatives has backed off a budget-cutting plan that would have gradually reduced the formula for matching federal funds -- a move that would have cost Michigan's children an estimated \$397 million over the next five years.

But there is plenty of bad news, especially for Michigan.

That's because a compromise bill passed at 6 a.m. Monday in the House hurts states like Michigan that have been rewarded for doing a better job of collecting child support. Those states will no longer be able to use federal incentive grants to match more federal dollars.

Michigan, which received \$29 million in federal incentive grants in 2004, plans to use that money to leverage \$58 million for child-support enforcement. But the compromise bill approved by the House this week prohibits that practice as double-dipping.

The reduction will cost Michigan \$104.8 million over the next five years, according to the Washington-based Center for Law and Social Policy.

That will force the state to cut its child support workforce -- mostly Friend of the Court employees hired by counties -- and probably reduce the amount of money collected for children by \$185 million over the same time period, according to the center.

Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support for the Michigan Department of Human Services, said with the federal restrictions Michigan's counties likely will have to lay off Friend of the Court employees -- the people who help ensure that noncustodial parents support their children.

"The cases that are hardest to collect, where the payor is moving from job to job or ducking us, are the cases that take the most time," Stephen said. "We will not have enough staff to be able to work those cases, plain and simple."

In addition, beginning next year the federal government will take a \$25 annual fee on every child support enforcement case over \$500, said Susan Thorman, president of the Michigan Friend of the Court Association. Currently, noncustodial parents in Michigan paying child support also pay a \$39 fee that is split between the counties and the state.

The \$25 will come from money that should be going to children, Thorman said. "There's good news and there's bad news and the bad news part of the equation we'll continue to work on," said U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz of Battle Creek, who was among nine Michigan Republicans to vote in

support of the bill. "I'm not satisfied with what happened, especially with the child support piece. We got half a loaf and I'd like to get more like the whole loaf."

Rep. Sander Levin, a Royal Oak Democrat, voted against the bill, saying it hurts children in low-income families.

Nationally, "child support enforcement keeps about 1 million kids out of poverty," Levin said.

"When you cut administrative funding for this program, there will be more kids in poverty."

On average, Thorman said, each Friend of the Court employee in her office brings in \$1 million in support that goes to kids. Fewer workers mean less money going to needy children, she said.

"Just when the program has gotten to the point where we're leading the nation in collections, we're starting to cut administrative costs," said Thorman. The cuts will cost counties in Michigan a total of \$21 million next year, she said.

Last year, facing less state support, Friend of the Court offices around Michigan cut over 100 positions, said Thorman. If the reduction in federal funds goes through, many other Friend of the Court employees will be laid off, she said.

The fate of the bill lies now in the Senate.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or kresnak@freepress.com.

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

\$10M back child pay netted Attorney General's Office expects to collect \$11.3M in overdue support by Dec. 31.

David Shepardson / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- The Michigan Attorney General's office has collected \$20.3 million in unpaid child support for more than 2,100 Michigan children since April 2003.

In 2005, Mike Cox's office collected more than \$10 million and Cox said at a news conference he expects that amount to reach \$11.3 million by Dec. 31, a 31 percent increase over the \$8.5 million collected in 2005. To date 1,600 non-paying parents have been arrested on warrants issued by Cox's office.

At the same time, Cox also criticized efforts by moves in Congress to cut federal funding of state programs to collect unpaid child support. Cox's office, which has six attorneys and 11 investigators assigned to child support, gets \$1.6 million annually in federal funds. That pays for two-thirds of the cost of the program.

The state has filed warrants seeking another \$79 million on behalf of another 3,500 kids.

"My office will go anywhere to track down parents who have the ability to pay, but who choose not to pay," Cox said.

His office has charged a neurosurgeon, an award-winning gospel playwright and former Detroit Lions football player Bennie Blades with failing to pay child support.

Trudi Stafford, 57, a Rochester Hills secretary, fought for years to receive court-ordered child support for her two daughters. Today they are both in their 30s, but her ex-husband has now paid the \$40,000 he owed. She gave the money to her daughters and one them put the money into a college fund for her granddaughter.

Cox touted a Web site, www.paykids.com to promote the issue of paying back child support.

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

The Detroit News

Homeless get more funding Detroit's federal money rises \$2.1M to \$22.28M, but providers say it is not nearly enough for 2006.

WASHINGTON -- Detroit will get \$22.28 million in federal funds next year to help it cope with its rising number of homeless, the Department of Housing and Urban Development announced Tuesday.

But, with an estimated 15,000 people homeless in Detroit and more expected, the increase of \$2.1 million above what local government programs and charities received in HUD funds last year won't come close to what service providers say is needed.

In a survey released by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Detroit predicts more of its residents will become homeless in 2006, largely due to low-paying jobs and a lack of affordable housing. In the past year, demand for emergency shelter jumped by 22 percent and the need for food by 30 percent, Detroit officials reported. Meanwhile, 9,000 people are on a waiting list for public housing vouchers in the city.

The \$22.28 million for Detroit includes \$20.6 million in grants for permanent and transitional housing, and, in what is essentially the same amount as what it got last fiscal year, \$1.68 million for emergency shelters.

"I could use a lot more," said Clifford W. Appling, chief executive officer of Simon House, which received \$88,675 -- about one-tenth of its budget -- to help it provide housing and other services to women living with HIV/AIDS in Detroit. "We'd have to reduce our services without this grant. Some agencies have had to close their doors because of lack of funding."

Overall, Michigan will receive \$53.5 million in HUD funding for homeless housing and emergency shelters, about \$180,000 more than last year. Yet, like Detroit, the state overall, reeling under continuing high unemployment rates, is likely to see demand continue to soar for housing assistance.

But governmental entities and charities helping the homeless in Michigan fared better than many states as total HUD support for the homeless fell to \$1.3 billion from last year's record of \$1.4 billion.

"If we didn't get our grant, we'd be in terrible shape," said Tobi Geibig, executive director of the Detroit-based Michigan Veterans Foundation, which received \$709,837, or about 40 percent of its total budget. "We help about 1,200 homeless veterans every year."

The Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries, a Christian-based group, received the largest amount in grants -- about \$3.9 million, or roughly one-quarter of its budget. The group's Web site says among its services is helping the homeless "become faithful Christians, disciplined into a local church."

While acknowledging controversy surrounding faith-based groups such as his receiving taxpayer money, chief executive director Chad Audi said Detroit Rescue serves all homeless people, regardless of whether they want to voluntarily learn about Christianity.

"That is the real secret of our success. If you look at our statistics, we are more successful than many other groups," Audi said.

Homeless money

Michigan: \$53.5 million

Detroit: \$22.28 million

Dearborn/Wayne County: \$3 million

St. Clair Shores/Warren/Macomb County: \$676,315

Pontiac/Royal Oak/Oakland County: \$3 million

Monroe County: \$177,880

** Figures include grants for housing and emergency shelters.*

COMMISSION AIMS \$10 MILLION AT ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The Public Service Commission has awarded \$10 million in energy efficiency grants to eight organizations that will assist low-income residents with the cost of winterization materials and offer free education on energy efficiency, the Commission announced on Tuesday

At \$4.5 million, the Department of Human Services' grant was the highest award and the Michigan Community Action Agency Association was the second largest at \$2 million. Both groups will distribute the money statewide to low income households that need help paying for home upgrades such as insulation and newer windows. Additionally, up to 20 percent of grant funds are available for winterization education.

Nova Development Group was awarded \$1.35 million for its proposal to upgrade and install winterization in low-income, multiple family homes across the state and Bay de Noc Community College received \$750,000 for the purchase and distribution of energy saving kits to lower income households in rural areas.

Other grant winners were as follows:

Nonprofit Facilities Assistance Centers: Received \$500,000 for matching grants to non-profits that want to increase their buildings' energy efficiency.

Urban Options: Received \$400,000 for winterization of low-income clients' homes, with a focus on heating systems.

Warm Training Center: Received \$250,000 toward energy education for customers who get energy assistance funds.

Habitat for Humanity: Received \$250,000 for efficiency upgrades in homes scheduled for construction in 2006.

The Commission also announced the continuation of another program aimed at helping the state's neediest residents. The program, called the Homeless Shelter Energy Assistance Credit Program, encourages utility companies to issue credits to equal up to 25 percent of homeless shelters' winter heating bills. Last winter, 194 shelters received the credits from DTE Energy, Consumers Energy and Citizens Gas, which absorbed more than \$120,000 in energy costs.

“At a time when shelter finances are stretched, the generosity of the participating utilities is greatly appreciated,” said Commission Chair Peter Lark. “The Commission commends the companies that participated last winter and is thankful that they have chosen to participate again this year.”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 20, 2005

Granholtm Approves Rules Allowing More Families to Qualify for Military Relief Fund

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholtm today announced she has approved emergency administrative rules that will allow the Michigan Family Emergency Relief Fund to provide financial assistance to families of Michigan servicemen and servicewomen more quickly and in a broader range of circumstances.

The rule change is a response to situations such as a house fire, furnace failure, or a rural water well replacement in which the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has been unable to assist.

"Our servicemen and servicewomen are true heroes who have put themselves in harms way for the protection and safety of those of us back home," Granholtm said. "While they are away keeping us safe, it is only right that we do all we can to assure that their families are taken care of in their absence."

Because financial issues often develop on an emergency basis, the new rule will improve the process by which the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) distributes monies from the fund. Under the new rule, a member of the soldier's family must incur a significant increase in the necessities of daily living, such as a loss of pay, or a significant emergency that warrants financial assistance. Previously, the administrative rules required that a service member's household income be reduced by 10 percent before the service member or their family could benefit from the fund.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs submitted updated rules to the Governor after seeing an immediate need to modify the rules in order to make the Military Family Relief Fund more accessible to qualified individuals.

The fund enables the DMVA to provide grants of up to \$2,000 in a calendar year to qualifying military families of Michigan's active duty Army National Guard, Air National Guard and military reserve members. The funds can be spent on clothing, housing, medical services, utilities, or any other related necessities of daily living. The need must occur while a family member is on active duty or be the result of a line-of-duty related injury or illness.

The fund was created in October 2004 when Granholtm signed Public Act 363 of 2004 and Public Act 364 of 2004. The funding is provided by generous contributions of Michigan taxpayers using a check off box on state income tax forms.

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Dec 21, 7:36 AM EST

Senate Poised for Showdown on the Budget

By ANDREW TAYLOR
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Senate Republicans expressed optimism as legislation to curb the budget deficit by shaving benefit programs will move toward a crucial vote.

But with lawmakers increasingly eager to adjourn for the holidays, another bill funding the Pentagon and rushing new relief to the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast faced a less certain future Wednesday because of a plan to allow oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Its passage was not assured as Democrats dug in for a filibuster and Republicans scratched for the 60 votes needed to prevail.

Vice President Dick Cheney rushed home from the Middle East to be on hand to cast a potential tie-breaking vote on the centerpiece of the GOP's budget agenda - a \$39.7 billion bill cutting federal benefit programs like Medicare and Medicaid for the first time in eight years.

Ordinarily, Senate passage of the House-Senate compromise measure would clear the bill for the president's signature. Senate Democrats, however, discovered flaws in the bill that subject it to arcane procedural maneuvers that would probably force it back to the House for a revote on a slightly modified version.

The House passed the bill near dawn Monday before interested parties such as AARP, the powerful seniors lobby, could weigh in with opposition. Any revote by the House would probably not occur before next year and delays in implementing the bill could rob it of some of its savings.

"If we prevail, this would have to go back to the House," said Sen. Kent Conrad of North Dakota, top Democrat on the Budget Committee.

Meanwhile, the immediate fate of a \$453 billion defense budget bill - which carries an additional \$29 billion or more in new aid for the Gulf Coast, \$3.8 billion to combat the avian flu and \$2 billion to double this year's budget for heating subsidies - was in doubt.

A decision by Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, to add a hotly contested plan to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling prompted a brawl with drilling opponents and Democrats who complained that he was exploiting the must-pass defense and hurricane aid bill to benefit his state and the oil industry.

Both Republicans and Democrats said a vote to break a filibuster and overcome another procedural challenge would be close. Republicans calculated that at least some drilling opponents would balk at slowing funding for the Pentagon and the war, as well as critically needed aid along the Gulf Coast.

"That would be absolutely horrible news for our Gulf states," said Sen. David Vitter, R-La. The \$29 billion aid package was 70 percent higher than a White House request that was deemed insufficient by Gulf Coast lawmakers.

Republicans were more confident about prevailing on the budget measure, though it was shaping up as a 50-50 tie with Cheney casting a rare tie-breaking vote.

As many as five of 55 Republicans appeared ready to defect on the bill, which would make the first significant curbs in federal benefit programs in nearly a decade. They were Sens. Gordon Smith of Oregon, Mike DeWine of Ohio, Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island and Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe of Maine.

"The budget reconciliation bill now before the U.S. Senate includes draconian cuts to vital health, education and child support enforcement programs," Collins said. Among the provisions Collins dislikes are new co-payments for poor people receiving health care from Medicaid and \$12.6 billion in cuts to lender subsidies within the student loan program.

Chafee, DeWine and Snowe are seeking new terms next year.

Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., announced his opposition Tuesday, joining the Senate's other 43 Democrats. Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., is also expected to vote against.

The budget in particular was important to GOP spending hawks worried that their core political supporters were losing faith in Republicans' ability to carry out their promises to cut spending. Despite the modest savings, Republicans called the benefit cut measure a good first step. Conservatives were also heartened by a 1 percent across-the-board cut to agency budgets that Congress funds each year.

Democrats said it was folly to call the GOP package a deficit-cutting plan since, when combined with a \$70 billion or so tax bill to follow early next year, it will increase the deficit by about \$30 billion.

Senate leaders agreed to try to wrap up major Senate business for the year on Wednesday. That left the fate of the USA Patriot Act reauthorization unclear. A Democratic-led filibuster blocked a renewal of the anti-terrorism measure last week, with critics of the bill demanding changes to protect the civil liberties of innocent Americans.

On the Net:

Senate: <http://senate.gov>

Senate Faces Showdown on Bills

Close Votes Expected on Spending Cuts, Arctic Oil Drilling

By Jonathan Weisman and Shailagh Murray Washington Post Staff Writers

Wednesday, December 21, 2005; Page A07

Vice President Cheney cut short a trip to the Middle East and rushed back to Washington overnight, preparing to cast a tiebreaking vote on budget cuts in the Senate today, as Republicans also make a high-stakes bid to approve oil drilling in the Alaska wilderness.

The budget legislation would trim federal spending growth by nearly \$40 billion over the next five years. Cheney's change in plans came as five Republican senators signaled they would vote against the measure, joining an apparently united Democratic caucus in opposing a bill that would allow states to impose new fees on Medicaid recipients, cut federal child support enforcement funds, impose new work requirements on state welfare programs and squeeze student lenders.

Five GOP defections would lead to a 50-50 Senate tie if all lawmakers vote. "We do need to reduce spending, but I cannot accept the priorities in this bill," said Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), in announcing her opposition to it.

Cheney canceled visits to Saudi Arabia and Egypt after stops in Iraq and earthquake-devastated Pakistan.

"The vice president is returning to Washington to be on hand in the Senate to fulfill his constitutional duties as president of the Senate and cast tiebreaking votes, if necessary," spokesman Steve Schmidt told reporters accompanying Cheney on his overseas trip.

Also today, a Senate showdown is expected over a provision allowing oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, added to the fiscal 2006 defense appropriations bill by Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska). Democrats intend to mount a procedural challenge in an effort to strip out the provision, or if necessary, to block the bill until Stevens backs down. Minority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) predicted "a very close vote."

Republican leaders have made contingency plans to reconvene the House tomorrow to pass a stripped-down defense bill that would fund the Pentagon at the 2005 level, if the current bill bogs down.

Stevens said on the Senate floor yesterday that he will not relent. "We're going to face up to ANWR either now or Christmas Day or New Year's Eve or sometime, however long we stay in." The veteran senator said that if the drilling provision is blocked, it would delay final passage of the defense bill until next year -- forcing the Pentagon to operate on an extension of 2005 funding levels.

Senate Appropriations Chairman Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) said he was "optimistic" about the drilling provision's chances, and defended Stevens against Democratic charges that he was breaking a Senate rule that prevents unrelated provisions from being inserted into final bills.

"There's nothing new about this process or procedure," Cochran said.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) continued to express confidence that the hard-fought budget measure would pass, possibly without Cheney's help. And it appeared the Republican bleeding had been stanching. Two moderates under pressure to oppose the deal, Sens. Arlen Specter (Pa.) and Norm Coleman (Minn.), said they would reluctantly support it.

Budget experts say the bill would make only a dent in the federal deficit, slicing less than one-half of 1 percent from the estimated \$14.3 trillion in federal spending over the next five years. But opponents say the poor would bear the brunt of the cuts -- especially to Medicaid, child support enforcement and foster care -- whereas original targets for belt-tightening, such as pharmaceutical companies and private insurers, largely escaped sanction.

A House-passed provision, for instance, would have allowed states to establish preferred medication lists for Medicaid, then steer patients to cheaper drugs by charging higher co-payments for medicines off the list. Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Ind.) garnered headlines last month by winning an exclusion from the provision for mental health drugs, a boon for one of his state's biggest companies, Eli Lilly. But the final House-Senate compromise eliminated the preferred-drug list provision, even though it maintained a House provision that allows states for the first time to charge poor Medicaid patients co-payments, premiums and deductibles.

Likewise, the compromise eliminated a Senate-passed provision that would have saved the federal government \$36 billion over the next decade by eliminating financial incentives to lure managed care companies into Medicare. Under White House pressure, the Senate provision was gutted in the House-Senate compromise.

The heated Senate debate yesterday also focused on complex student loan changes that would save \$12.7 billion over five years. Under the provision, student loan interest rates would be locked in at 6.8 percent and could not be refinanced as commercial rates fluctuate. Private lenders would continue to be able to borrow money at a rate guaranteed to generate a profit. Currently, any time the student loan interest rate is higher than the bank's guaranteed rate, the bank gets to keep the extra profit. Under the budget bill, that windfall would have to be returned to the federal government, a change that should yield \$18 billion in savings. The change has strong Democratic advocates, including Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (Mass.).

But student groups, higher-education advocates and their allies in Congress say much more of those savings should go toward expanding higher-education assistance or lowering student loan rates, not deficit reduction. "They could give students a lower interest rate, but their choice is to keep interest rates high," said Luke Swarthout of the U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

"They're asking students to pay for tax cuts."

Editorial

The Poor Need Not Apply

The New York Times

Published: December 21, 2005

On Sept. 15, speaking from New Orleans's Jackson Square, President Bush was eloquent: "As all of us saw on television, there is also some deep, persistent poverty in this region as well," he said. "We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality."

Did the president really mean anything by those fine words? As Leslie Eaton and Ron Nixon reported in The Times last week, federal loans to rebuild homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina have been flowing to wealthy neighborhoods in New Orleans but not to poor ones.

The Small Business Administration, which runs the federal government's main disaster recovery program for both businesses and homeowners, has processed only a third of the 276,000 home loan applications it has received. And it has rejected a whopping 82 percent of those, a higher percentage than in previous disasters, on the grounds that applicants didn't have high enough incomes or good enough credit ratings.

That is exactly the kind of barrier to upward mobility that Mr. Bush talked about battering down. Poor people live from paycheck to paycheck, unable to accumulate assets. They let their water bill go unpaid one month so that they can pay their light bill. Their credit ratings tend to reflect that.

Those are basic truths that the Bush administration obviously understands. Yet it encouraged poor people to apply for low-interest loans to rebuild their homes while keeping rules that would make it clearly impossible for most of them to qualify. Despite the widespread poverty in the most damaged regions, according to the Times article, the Small Business Administration has not adjusted its creditworthiness standards, which are roughly comparable to a bank's. As a result, well-off neighborhoods have received 47 percent of the loan approvals, while poverty-stricken ones have gotten 7 percent.

No one expects the government to squander tax dollars on bad loans. But there are ways around that, through grants, for instance, and looser standards for the many who straddle the shoulders of good credit and bad credit. Otherwise, the administration has engaged in the worst kind of cruelty - one that encourages the poor to think help is on the way, then swats down anyone who actually requests the promised assistance.

Superrich stingy to charities, study says

Those who make \$50,000 - \$100,000 give more than those who take in more than \$10M

David Cay Johnston / New York Times

December 21, 2005

Working-age Americans who make \$50,000 to \$100,000 a year are two to six times more generous in the share of their investment assets that they give to charity than those Americans who make more than \$10 million, a pioneering study of federal tax data shows.

The least generous of all working-age Americans in 2003, the latest year for which Internal Revenue Service data is available, were among the young and prosperous -- the 285 taxpayers age 35 and under who made more than \$10 million -- and the 18,600 taxpayers making \$500,000 to \$1 million. The top group had on average \$101 million of investment assets while the other group had on average \$2.4 million of investment assets.

On average these two groups made charitable gifts equal to 0.4 percent of their assets, while people the same age who made \$50,000 to \$100,000 gave gifts equal to more than 2.5 percent of their investment assets, six times that of their far wealthier peers.

Investment assets measures the value of stocks, bonds and other investments assets held in the tax system. Excluded from this are retirement accounts, which are generally held outside the tax system, personal property like furniture, and art and equity in homes.

The IRS data was analyzed by the NewTithing Group, a philanthropic research organization in San Francisco that since 1998 has been encouraging the most prosperous Americans to give more. The full report was posted at www.newtithing.org.

Tim D. Stone, the president of NewTithing, said taxpayers who itemize took \$148.4 billion in deductions for charitable gifts in 2003. The American Association of Fundraising Counsel, an organization of companies that advise charities on seeking donations, estimates giving by all Americans, including those who file simple tax returns, was \$180.6 billion.

The study used unpublished IRS data from 180,000 tax returns to analyze giving by income, assets, gender, marital status and age. It found that disparities in giving by income class declined once taxpayers reach age 65, but it also found that as Americans grew older their giving as a share of their investment assets also generally declined.

The superrich, with incomes of \$10 million or more and average assets of \$214 million, made gifts equal to 1.5 percent of their assets.

The study also found that single men, generally, are more generous than single women. Among the wealthiest singles, men gave 1.5 percent of assets compared with 1.1 percent for women.

Wealth does not explain the disparity.

Single men in the top income group, \$10 million or more, had average investment assets of \$124.7 million; the women averaged \$244 million.

Even though the wealthiest women gave at a lower rate than the wealthiest men, in dollar terms the women, who were far wealthier, gave more. The 247 women gave an average of \$2.68 million each compared with \$1.95 million for the 655 wealthiest men.

Published December 21, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Third-graders' blankets will warm needy Potterville students make 21 of them for homeless children

By Hugh Leach
Lansing State Journal

POTTERVILLE - Rachel Holliday, 9, had heard how good it makes a person feel to give a gift to a needy person.

She and 69 other Potterville Elementary School third-graders now know that feeling themselves.

The students made 21 fleece blankets that were delivered to the SIREN/Eaton Shelter in Charlotte last week to be given to homeless children.

"My brother told me how good he felt when he gave some of his toys to some people whose house burned down about eight years ago," Rachel said. "Now I know how really good it feels to help someone."

Each of the school's three third-grade classes made seven blankets. Materials were purchased with \$400 made available through the school, and Jo-Ann Fabrics and Crafts in Charlotte gave the third-graders a 60 percent discount to help make the money go as far as possible.

"It was fun to make the blankets and it feels good to help other people," said third-grader Michelle Quintela, 9.

Loren Smalley, 8, was one of four students who accompanied the teachers to the shelter Dec. 12 to deliver the blankets. There, he saw both people donating to the shelter and some of the people applying for assistance.

"I learned about people who need help for Christmas and why we made the blankets," he said.

Teacher Coty Dobie said this is the second year that third-grade students have made blankets for the shelter. It fits in with the third-grade study of communities.

"I have made blankets for my family," Dobie said. "Doing it for homeless people seemed like a great project to teach kids about helping needy people in our community," Dobie said.

Students also wrote short essays about the experience, she said. Many of them are posted in the school.

"This was a great experience for the students," teacher Tausha Stiver said. "They took a lot of pride in what they were doing. It was something special for them."

It was also something special for Linda Nichols, an administrative aide/case aide at the shelter.

"To have third-graders aware of other children needing help amazes me," she said.

The blankets are really special for the children who receive them, Nichols said.

"They think it is so cool to have their own blanket for their own bed," she said.

"If you could see the smiles on their faces, you would know how much these blankets mean to them."

Contact Hugh Leach at 377-1119 or hleach@lsj.com.

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

Nonprofit in Troy needs help in assisting others

Troy People Concerned appeals for donations because hunger and lack of shelter don't take a holiday.

Shawn D. Lewis / The Detroit News

TROY -- Tammy Wardrop is not sure her Christmas will be merry this year.

She's divorced, living in the Troy Mobile Villa trailer park and depending on the generosity of others to help put groceries in her refrigerator and pay the heating bills to warm her family.

"When you're struggling and trying to get somewhere, it's tough" Wardrop said.

For the last few years, Wardrop has relied on Troy People Concerned to help her. Now, the nonprofit is in need of help.

"Without the help of Troy People Concerned, it would be terrible," Wardrop said.

Troy People Concerned, an information and referral agency, provides help in the form of a food pantry, clothing closet, holiday baskets and limited financial assistance with utility bills and rent. It helps about 500 families a year.

But the group relies on donations from individuals, churches and local businesses, and the \$21,360 client assistance budget for 2005-06 was drained in eight months.

At the same time, calls for help are up from last year.

The group received 643 calls through November, up from 549 in the year-ago period.

A snapshot of Troy would not immediately bring poverty to mind. But low-income residents live there.

"My lot rent is \$363, but I'm barely making enough to cover the bills and pay the lot rent," said Wardrop, who works part-time for a landscaping company, earning \$20 an hour.

"If you didn't know it was here (mobile home park), you wouldn't see it. Everybody who lives here is very nice. I don't think there are over 100 trailers here."

For the population ages 25 and over in Troy, 92 percent are high school graduates and 50 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

About 21 percent of the total households earn between \$100,000 and \$149,000 annually.

Families with a female-headed household with no husband present only represent 5.7 percent.

Families below the poverty level only represent 1.7 percent of the total population of 80,959.

But those people need help, and Anastasha Lynn, director of Troy People Concerned, said their numbers may be increasing.

"Unemployment is increasing because companies are shutting down or moving out of town," she said. "We had to turn away 20 people this month."

"And the volume of calls we're getting this year are up from last year, but the donations are down because of the tsunami, a major earthquake and hurricane Katrina. I think people are just exhausted. They're tired of giving and giving."

But just in time, Lynn said help arrived last week from a junior high school and a church.

"The Larson Middle School in Troy held a food drive for us on Wednesday, and that helped fill up our food pantry," Lynn said. "And the women's group at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church raised \$460 in food certificates for us, also on Wednesday."

But that won't last forever. Much of the assistance TPC receives -- about 30 percent, according to Lynn, is from the religious community.

""Helping a stranger is what they're about and that's also what we're about."

To get involved

Troy People Concerned depends on fundraisers to help others. A fundraiser at Shield's Pizzeria will be held Feb. 3-5 at 1476 W. Maple in Troy. Twenty percent of each check will go toward benefiting TPC. Another fundraiser will be held Feb. 18 at the Big Beaver United Methodist Church, 3753 John R in Troy. The pasta dinner will cost \$15 for adults and \$5 for children. For information, call (248) 589-9199.

Police officers play Santa Adopt-A-Family still going strong

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

BY AMALIE NASH

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

For Debbie Williams-Hoak, memories of childhood Christmas celebrations are filled with heartache.

There were years of few or no presents, times when her parents didn't even put up a tree or decorate the house.

Years later, when Williams-Hoak became a professional golfer and played in the Ladies Professional Golf Association, she vowed to do something for children during the holidays.

The partnership that formed between Williams-Hoak and the Ann Arbor Police Department marks its 10th anniversary this year, and organizers say the need is even greater than in the past.

"I've been fortunate in my career to get to know a lot of people and be able to do something to make a difference in people's lives," Williams-Hoak said. "I remember waking up on Christmas morning so excited, and there would be nothing there. I was disappointed and had a lot of heartache, and I want to do what I can to not have that happen to other children."

The Police Department's Adopt-A-Family program included more than 30 families this year, and 330 families over the last 10 years.

In addition to Ann Arbor, police departments across Washtenaw County have gotten into the spirit of giving - including the Sheriff's Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti and Pittsfield Township. Officers from those departments participated in "Shop With A Cop" programs this month aimed at providing gifts to underprivileged children.

Ann Arbor Officer Dawn King delivered gifts to children in her patrol car Sunday and Monday and said she was overwhelmed by the response this year. She has helped to organize the program for the last eight years, working with local school principals to identify children in need.

"This year the need seems even greater than ever before and the thank yous are so genuine," King said. "When we see the kids, they run up with hugs and smiles."

After 10 years, the Adopt-A-Family program runs with few kinks, but the planning begins in early November. Once families are identified and contacted, children are asked to devise specific wish lists of holiday gifts.

Organizers solicit donations, go through wish lists and create large shopping lists. A group of about eight volunteers heads out for days of shopping, picking items directly from the children's lists. A wrapping party follows.

Among this year's top picks are guitars, Legos, Barbies, video games and electronic items like CD players.

"It's a massive shopping list and can be a challenge sometimes because we want to have a variety for each child and the same amount of gifts for each child in the same family," Williams-Hoak said. "Some of the sponsors want to buy the gifts for the children themselves, so we assign out items from the lists. This program is unique because we're giving them exactly what they asked for. It's really a lot of fun."

Phil Naylor, owner of Naylor Motors in Ann Arbor, said his entire staff donates to the effort, and the Naylor's help wrap presents before they're delivered.

Naylor said he enjoys hearing stories of the gift-giving, including one this year when officers delivered gifts to a woman who had endured physical abuse and had recently moved out. She cried when she was presented with gifts for her children.

"It feels good to help those who are less fortunate enjoy Christmas," Naylor said. "This is a local program, and we know exactly where the money is going."

Williams-Hoak said one reason she wanted to pair with the police department was the opportunity to present officers in a positive light. That's why officers deliver gifts in uniform in their patrol cars.

King, a former DARE officer, said she believes the program allows officers to have a positive rapport with people in the community as they deliver gifts.

"I've gotten teary-eyed a couple times this year as we were delivering," King said. "It's very moving. I'm glad we can help families have a good holiday."

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6832.

Pig Gig profits go out to local charities

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

By Pati LaLonde
Bay City Times Writer

Local nonprofits received a little green for the holidays this morning when Wendy Dore presented checks to the 18 charities taking part in this year's Labadie Pig Gig presented by State Farm.

Dore, event founder, passed out the checks at a press conference at Lumber Barons' Charcoal Grill & Brew Pub, 804 E. Midland St.

Dore won't say what each charity received but said the amount is based on how long each charity has been involved with Pig Gig and the amount of time it put into the event.

She did say that the total amount of the checks, combined with the money raised by each charity through activities and fundraisers at the event, exceeded \$70,000.

That amount is a bit less than last year's bounty, Dore said.

"We didn't make as much as past years," she said. "I attribute that to the economy and gas prices."

But, on a positive note, Dore said a lot of charities raised more money with their individual activities and fundraisers at Pig Gig, held in August.

"People were very generous when they walked in the door," she said.

The reason why funds were not dispensed until today is because not all of the sponsorship money had been collected and there were still some outstanding bills to pay.

With the checks now handed out, Dore is looking ahead to next year - Pig Gig is scheduled Aug. 3-6 - and how to boost profits. One idea on the drawing board is a business or corporate rib challenge on the first night of Pig Gig.

"Guys at GM tell me they have a great recipe, 'I cook the best ribs in the world,' " Dore said.

"These are just backyard barbecue people. Rib competitors will be the judges. I think it will be fun."

Dore also is taking a look at entertainment. She won't be booking an act like Wayne Newton again, but she won't be skimping on the entertainment either.

"One of the reasons the profits weren't as large is because we had such high expenses and most of that is attributed to Wayne Newton," she said. "We can get good quality entertainment without spending the money."

The singer came with a lot of hidden costs, such as a certain limo that was expensive, union background singers from Flint and Detroit and a special sound system.

"Unfortunately that money could have gone to the charities," she said. "I want to keep that money here in the community instead of Wayne Newton's pocket."

- Pati LaLonde is a features writer for The Times. She can be reached at (989) 894-9666, or by e-mail at plalonde@bc-times.com.

Bringing joy to other people'

Visit to Fenton senior center teaches fifth-graders value of giving

FENTON

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

By Robert Snell

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FENTON - Pearl Root clutched the teddy bear by the paws and made it prance atop a table Tuesday.

Across the table at the Fenton Extended Care Center, Jerry Galloway cried tears of joy.

Twenty-six fifth-graders from Lake Fenton's Torrey Hill Intermediate School brought teddy bears and music to the center's residents in a mutual lesson in sharing, caring and giving and focusing on a holiday purpose.

"To bring joy to other people," said student Mike Casanova, 11. "I was really happy watching them smile."

The students spent weeks reading and analyzing teddy bear stories for theme and content, then writing their own and giving one to each senior.

"I get to keep the story, too?" resident Jimmie Ray Sharp Sr., 62, asked student Wayne Ferris, 10.

"I tell you what: Being in here, this gives you an upgrade," Sharp continued, clutching the bear.

"It makes me feel good and joyful seeing young people."

That's the point, said center Activities Director Tammy Buning.

"For some, it reminds them of their childhood," she said. "At this time of year, it reminds most of them of their families."

Students also spent a week rehearsing a song written with the help of Lake Fenton parent Ron Moore. All five fifth-grade Torrey Hill classes participated in similar projects and fanned out to area senior centers Tuesday.

Student Lance Hasenfratz gave Galloway his story, an epic tale about a bear and a boat crew stranded in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

"It's fun," Lance, 11, said afterward. "It's peaceful here."

Students at the care center sang several songs, including "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and "Jingle Bells."

After the students finished the final bars of their teddy bear song, resident Bob Boyd rallied a cheer.

"Hip, hip hooray," Boyd commanded.

The kids fanned out to distribute the bears. Some stood awkwardly, unsure whom to approach.

Others read their stories as seniors leaned in, listening intently.

Teacher Joan Kinghorn, who has participated in such visits for eight years, said the visit teaches students the value of giving.

QUICK TAKE

Seasons greetings

The Torrey Hill

Intermediate

School class was

among five classes

that visited seniors

Tuesday to spread

holiday cheer.

"And to see they can make a difference in people's lives," she said.

Take Dorthy Bouchard.

She's 87 and was wowed by the gift.

"I've never had a teddy bear in my life," she said, cradling the bear.

Holiday fundraising drive moves into high gear

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

By Matt Vande Bunte
The Grand Rapids Press

Delivery day has come and gone, but the fundraising engine still is revving for Santa Claus Girls. Frank Ringewold is one of the donors behind the wheel. He and the other 60 members of the Two-Trackers Four Wheel Drive Club chipped in \$100.

"It's an easy time of year to be charitable," said Ringewold, of Byron Township, a longtime member of the local group of recreational trail riders.

And since the club, founded in 1974, goes on family oriented, nonalcoholic rides, a children's charity has been a perfect match for some of the membership dues the past several years.

"I remember growing up knowing about the Santa Claus Girls," said Ringewold, 63, whose wife often joins him on the tracks in their 1978 Jeep CJ5. "You just can't beat (giving to) children for Christmas."

The contribution is one of hundreds that will help the Press-sponsored charity meet the needs of children in Kent County, even after 11,284 kids received gifts Saturday. The goal of \$165,000 will help the Santa Claus Girls buy presents for Christmas 2006. About 25 percent of that goal still is needed.

Some of that money for the first time is coming from the Grand Valley Corvette Association, which donated \$500.

For more than two decades, the club of 130 Corvette enthusiasts has raffled off a new car, with proceeds going to charities that focus on Down Syndrome and Spina Bifida. This year, members added Santa Claus Girls to their list.

"We know everything's going to help kids, to give them a little bit better Christmas," association President Cheryl Davis said.

Cash donations will be accepted throughout the holiday season. Mail them to Santa Claus Girls, c/o The Grand Rapids Press, 155 Michigan St. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Names of contributors will appear in The Press, so please double check for correct spellings. To contribute by credit card, call 222-5796 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

Growing Years assists needy

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

MEGAN FROUNFELTER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

For 14 years, Growing Years Christian School & Child Care Center has brightened the eyes and widened the smiles on hundreds of little faces throughout mid-Michigan.

Families and employees from the school, 2190 Wieneke in Saginaw Township, have donated gifts to children in need this holiday season, said school owner Anita Collins.

"We had a wonderful response," she said.

Refuge Center Ministries, 1017 S. Franklin, provided the school with the names of 100 individuals who need a little extra this year. Some of the children who will receive packages came to Saginaw after vacating Mississippi and Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

"Growing Years Christian School has always been a blessing," said Relinda Mushatt, Refuge Center Ministries pastor. "They are so excited about giving to people, and so are we."

Members of First Baptist Church of Saginaw, 322 N. Jefferson, donated dozens of cookies and fruit to the Refuge Center for children this Christmas season, Mushatt said.

latest update: Tuesday, December 20, 2005 at 08:11 AM EST

Veteran's tombstone returned Marker missing for 20 years returned to East Palatka grave

By PAULETTE PERHACH

More than 20 years after being laid to rest, Clarence Dixon now lies under a tombstone.

His was one of seven veterans' tombstones found about two years ago doubling as the front steps of an abandoned mobile home in Flagler Estates. The tombstone was chipped and scratched from its long journey, but no one seemed to care at a headstone placement ceremony held Monday. Dixon's family and other veterans gathered in the cold around the grave, where before had only been a corroded temporary marker.

"I didn't even notice the cold because of the warmth of the people here," said Clarence Dixon's younger brother, also named Clarence, a retired police chief from Miami. "This has all been so pleasant."

The Interlachen American Legion honored Dixon with a rifle salute.

Clarence had his hand over his heart as "Taps" played.

"This whole experience, there's just no words to describe what we feel in our hearts about it," said Clarence. "We had no idea the tombstone had been taken. I'm very proud of the veterans organizations for getting this done."

Dixon was a corporal in the U.S. Army during World War II who "kept the tanks rolling," according to his family.

"He was very into his military service," said his son, Leonard, director of the Bureau of Juvenile Justice in Lansing, Mich. "He just loved doing it. He'd talk about Europe, the carnage, the death, but he'd talk about the camaraderie of the black soldiers, too."

After the war, Dixon went on to become a police officer in Glades County. His brother, son, and grandson, Joe, 24, followed in his footsteps of law enforcement.

Dixon died of a stroke in 1984 at age 71.

"He would be overjoyed (about the tombstone,)" said his cousin, John Bolling, 80, of Putnam County. "I bet he's saluting right now."

Joseph McDermott, veterans services officer for St. Johns County, has been searching for the proper owner of Dixon's gravestone, along with six others,

since he started his position with the county 18 months ago. They were outside behind the office, and no one knew where they belonged. He had no luck finding the proper graves until he went to the public. "I'd like to thank the public for all their response," he said. "The headstone was long overdue in getting there, but it got there. I couldn't have had a better feeling in my heart."

An extended family member read about the tombstones in the newspaper and contacted Leonard, who called McDermott.

McDermott worked with Thomas Moltimore of Putnam County Veterans to locate Dixon's grave. They're still working to find the six remaining.

"This is just the first one. There are others out there," said Moltimore.

This Week in Washington

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House Passes Reconciliation Conference Report with Major Changes to Medicaid and TANF

On December 19, the House passed the fiscal year 2006 conference report for S. 1932, the Deficit Control Act of 2005. The action, which followed agreement on the report reached on December 18 by House and Senate conferees, would make major changes in a number of public human service programs. It reauthorizes the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and contains many new TANF and related programs provisions. The bill applies work participation rates and work requirements to recipients in separate state programs; maintains separate two-parent work rates; maintains the work rate at 50 percent but revises the caseload credit to look back to FY 2005 rather than the present FY 1996; directs the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to regulate and review activities that count toward work and how to count and verify reporting of work hours; adds a new state penalty if states do not establish and maintain work verification procedures; increases child care funding by \$1 billion; eliminates the high-performance and out-of-wedlock bonuses; includes \$750 million for marriage promotion and \$50 million for fatherhood grants; applies recipients in separate state programs to quarterly reporting requirements; institutes a new \$25 user fee for child support; eliminates the ability of states to use child support incentive grant funds to match federal dollars; includes a series of child support changes from House and Senate TANF proposals; and provides a total of \$1 billion in new Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program funding for FY 2007. Since Senate approval of the report is still pending, the House on December 19 also passed a separate three-month extension of the TANF program.

The TANF action followed a strong Senate vote on December 14 to instruct conferees to take TANF reauthorization out of the bill and address it as freestanding legislation. The vote, 64–27, came on a motion offered by Sen. Thomas Carper (D-Del.) and cosponsored by Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine). All Democrats who voted did so in the affirmative, as did Sen. James Jeffords (I-Vt.) and 23 Republicans. Also on December 14, the Senate approved similar motions to instruct conferees to oppose cuts in Medicaid, the Food Stamp Program (FSP), and child support. The conference report did not make any FSP changes.

In Medicaid, the conference report has cuts of about \$4.8 billion over five years. The cuts are closer to the original House bill and include options for states to impose cost-sharing and create flexible benefit packages. In addition, the bill includes restrictions on seniors who transfer their assets to qualify Medicaid. There were no substantial changes to the language on Targeted Case Management (TCM) that concerned states, or to third-party liability. The TCM language would prohibit certain foster care

services from being covered by Medicaid's TCM, as well as limit federal financial participation for case management and for targeted case management services when a third party would also be liable to pay for these services, "including as reimbursement under a medical, social, education, or other program." Areas for additional spending in the legislation include reimbursement for the coverage of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. The bill includes provisions to modify the calculation of Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) rates for states that were negatively affected. The bill also includes some additional spending on provisions for individuals with disabilities and their families.

In child welfare, the report would eliminate Title IV-E administrative claims for otherwise-federally eligible children in unlicensed foster homes, with the exception that claims can be made for up to 12 months for a child in a relative's home that is in the process of becoming licensed or approved. They are also eliminated for children in ineligible facilities such as detention centers, psychiatric and medical hospitals, and institutions with more than 25 beds, with the exception that claims can be retroactively made for one calendar month (but only if the child is returned to an eligible foster care setting). A new requirement is added to conduct foster care candidacy redeterminations every six months. The report also reverses the *Rosales v. Thompson* decision by limiting the determination of eligibility for IV-E foster care maintenance and adoption assistance. It also reduces funding for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program and amends the Court Improvement section of Title IV-B. A link to the complete bill text is available on the House Rules Committee web site at <http://www.rules.house.gov/>.

The Senate plans to consider the conference report during the week of December 19. The Senate will also take up the FY 2006 Defense Appropriations bill, which includes a 1 percent across-the-board cut to all domestic spending programs (except for veterans programs) to pay for Katrina and Rita relief funds.

House Approves Labor-HHS Conference Report

On December 14, the House passed the revised conference report for the FY 2006 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill, H.R. 3010. The report was adopted by a 215–213 vote, and will provide \$142.5 billion in discretionary funding. Appropriators made changes to the bill after the House rejected the initial conference agreement on November 17 by a vote of 209–224. The revised report increased rural health spending by \$90 million, provided \$9 million for a research and policy program, and provided \$39 million for a grant outreach program. A provision was removed from the original report that would bar Medicare coverage of erectile dysfunction drugs. Overall, the bill would provide \$105 billion more than in FY 2005, a 21 percent increase mostly stemming from additional funding for mandatory Medicaid and Medicare programs. H.R. 3010 provides \$2.2 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). During earlier conference deliberations, Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.) offered an amendment to provide an additional \$2 billion in LIHEAP funds, but the amendment failed. Obey offered another amendment, also defeated, that would have extended the deadline to sign up for the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit by six months, to December 31, 2006. The Senate plans to take up the bill during the week of December 19.

Katrina Homesteading Act Introduced

On December 13, Senators Wayne Allard (R-Colo.) and Michael Enzi (R-Wyo.) introduced S. 2088, the Hurricane Katrina Recovery Homesteading Act of 2005. The legislation creates a homesteading initiative within the Department of Housing and Urban Development that offers displaced low-income families in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi the opportunity to purchase a home owned by the federal government. The text of the legislation will be available at <http://thomas.loc.gov>

Hearing Reviews Response by Charities to Hurricane Katrina

On December 13, the House Ways and Means Oversight Subcommittee held a hearing to review the response by charities to Hurricane Katrina. Chairman Jim Ramstad (R-Minn.) indicated that the hearing would provide an opportunity to examine the lessons learned on efforts to prepare and respond. The hearing also covered how contributions by citizens have been and will be used to help those in need. Rep. Ramstad and ranking member John Lewis (D-Ga.) gave the opening remarks. Witnesses included Rep. Jim McCrery (R-La.) and representatives from the Government Accountability Office, American Red Cross; Salvation Army of America, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, American Institute of Philanthropy, National Spinal Cord Injury Association, and Resources for Independent Living. Copies of testimony are available at <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/hearings.asp?formmode=detail&hearing=455>.

FNS Issues Memo on Standard Utility Allowance

On December 9, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) issued a letter to state agencies on adjusting the FSP Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) for the 2005-2006 winter season. The memo responded to requests from states asking FNS to approve increases in their SUAs for heating and cooling based on projections of substantial price increases in energy costs. The memo said that FNS cannot approve the use of anticipated energy costs, but that states must use actual documented costs. The memo said that basing SUAs on estimates of future costs would result in benefit level increases that are not contemplated in the agency's current budget. It instructs regional offices to deny state requests to adjust their SUAs prospectively unless the state is prepared to offer an offsetting reduction in program costs by reducing benefit levels in another area through the use of Section 17 demonstration waiver authority.

FNS Issues Final Rule on EBT and Retail Food Stores

On December 5, FNS published a final rule on FSP electronic benefit transfer (EBT) provisions of the 2002 farm bill. The rule revises FSP regulations pertaining to the standards for approval of EBT systems, the participation of retail food stores and wholesale food concerns, and state agency liabilities and federal sanctions. The changes will allow FNS to use delivery methods other than certified mail when notifying retailers or state agencies of adverse action; permit the agency to approve alternative methods of issuing FSP benefits during disasters; eliminate the requirement that federal costs for EBT systems cannot exceed the costs of the paper systems they replace; and allow group homes and institutions to redeem EBT benefits directly through banks rather than going through authorized wholesalers or other retailers. The final rule has two changes compared with the proposed rule, which was published May 6, 2003. FNS is not finalizing the proposed portion of 7 CFR 274.12 that provides that the cost of administering statewide benefit issuance after implementation of the EBT system should be funded at the regular federal financial participation rate, up to the level of the current coupon issuance costs; this wording contains outdated information since coupons are no longer issued. Second, 7 CFR 278.2(g)(2) incorrectly proposed as mandatory the requirement that authorized drug addict and alcoholic treatment and rehabilitation programs, group living arrangements, shelters for battered women and children, and public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers for homeless FSP households must redeem EBT benefits directly through an insured financial institution. The notice was published in the December 5 Federal Register (70 FR 72350-72355) and is available at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20051800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2005/pdf/05-23619.pdf>

CMS Announces Availability of 1-800-Medicare Number January 1 and 2

On December 14, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced that the 1-800-Medicare phone number will be operational on January 1-2, 2006. The number is a resource for Medicare Part D information. There had been previous discussions that the number might be turned off on these days due to the federal holiday. This information has been clarified, and the number will in fact be

operational for individuals with questions. Additional information about Medicare Part D is available at <http://www.medicare.gov>.

ACF Asks for Comments on TANF Sanction Survey

On December 19, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) announced a proposed information collection through a study designed to determine how local welfare offices implement sanction policies in the TANF program. The study will survey local welfare staff to gather in-depth qualitative information on how workers interpret the policies and apply them in specific instances. According to the announcement, the results of this study would give ACF a better understanding of possible outcomes of various sanction policies, which in turn will help ACF design a research program to study the effect of sanctions. Copies of the proposed collection of information can be obtained and comments may be forwarded by writing to the ACF Office of Administration, Office of Information Services, 370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W., Washington, DC 20447, Attn: ACF Reports Clearance Officer, e-mail infocollection@acf.hhs.gov. Comments on the proposal should be made within 60 days of publication. The announcement was made in the December 19 Federal Register (70 FR 75180) and is available at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20051800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2005/05-24174.htm>.

GAO Issues Report on IDEA Services for Young Children

On December 14, the Government Accountability Office issued a report on how states have implemented Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a program to provide early intervention services for children under age 3 with disabilities. The report found that states have developed public awareness campaigns to reach children in need of services but still face many barriers in identifying eligible children. Although eligibility criteria differ between states, these differences do not fully explain differences in the percentage of children served. States also reported challenges in recruiting professionals qualified to provide intervention services. The study also found that states could benefit from additional Department of Education guidance on improving transitions from Part C services to Part B, which provides services for children above age 3. The report, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Education Should Provide Additional Guidance to Help States Smoothly Transition Children to Preschool* (GAO-06-26), is available at <http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-26>.